

Collaboratory Opens in Fort Myers

The Southwest Florida Community Foundation's new headquarters was designed for community use.

BY JENNIFER REED



Southwest Florida Community Foundation CEO Sarah Owen introduces the community to the Collaboratory on Oct. 21.

In one of Fort Myers' most historic structures on Sunday sprung one of its most forward-thinking initiatives—the Collaboratory, the new headquarters of the Southwest Florida Community Foundation and, the organization hopes, a place where residents,

business owners, civic leaders, nonprofits and others will come together to share ideas and dream big.

“This belongs to you and to our community,” said Larry Hobbs, the board chairman.

The building is a marriage of past and future—the old Atlantic Coast Line railroad station merged with a new wing that is characterized by big picture windows, clean architectural lines, and lots of space to meet, work and hang out (a coffee bar sits at the building’s heart).

The 24,460-square-foot campus is a joint venture of the Community Foundation and the City of Fort Myers and was paid for largely with a \$10 million New Market Tax credit deal, which is a federal program to spur development in economically distressed communities. The building, on Jackson Street, is located in a part of the city targeted for redevelopment.

Several hundred people attended Sunday’s Party in the Park to celebrate the grand opening.

Sarah Owen, the foundation CEO (and an advisory board member to *Gulfshore Life* magazine), told the crowd that she had not convened everyone there to show off the building but rather to challenge them to “imagine what you could do inside of that building.”

Leading up to the affair, Owen said she’s fielded lots of questions about what happens next and what will happen inside those walls. The answer, she suggested, is up to those who choose to collaborate, brainstorm, vision and socialize there.

“I can’t wait to see what happens next,” she said.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the Southwest Florida Community Foundation.